



Public Health Data Standards Consortium – Meeting the Emerging Needs of Public Health

I. Introduction

The Public Health Data Standards Consortium (PHDSC) is actively involved in setting a new agenda for data standardization in the new millennium with broad cooperation of national and state public health and health data organizations. The PHDSC was a natural outgrowth of the enactment of the **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996** (P.L. 104-191)

II. Why are HIPAA Data Standards Important to Public Health?

HIPAA's Administrative Simplification (AS) provisions are aimed at promoting improvement in data standardization within the health insurance industry. The overall goal involves improved efficiency and effectiveness within the health care system through creation of national standards for electronic data interchange of administrative information. While insurance claim, enrollment, and eligibility transactions remain the focus, these data standards will impact greatly on future Public Health data collection efforts.

Hospital discharge databases, disease registries (e.g., tumor registries, reportable disease databases), trauma registries, vital statistics, and immunization registries are public health surveillance databases which rely on health care encounters to trigger data reporting. Although Public Health agencies are not mandated to comply with HIPAA's data standards, many are moving toward policies consistent with HIPAA's mandate recognizing that administrative simplification provisions will strengthen public health data capabilities. Clearly this pressure to conform to HIPAA standards will be greater for databases like hospital discharge systems that are highly reflective of administrative data content.

In all cases, complying with the newly established standards for the insurance transactions will enhance data quality and political support for data collection efforts. Providers' data systems will be programmed to accommodate the HIPAA standards, jeopardizing the accuracy and timeliness of reporting requirements that are inconsistent with these standards. The establishment of standard identifiers for patients, health plans, and providers, as required by HIPAA, has the potential to significantly improve public health's ability to monitor the health care system and link data from multiple data sets with appropriate protections.

III. Why was the Public Health and Data Standards Consortium developed?

On November 2-3, 1998, the National Center for Health Statistics of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in conjunction with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics (NCVHS), convened a workshop to examine the implications of HIPAA for the practice of public health and health services research. The workshop, "The Implications of HIPAA's Administrative Simplification Provisions for Public Health and Health Services Research," brought together 85 leaders in health statistics, research, and informatics to examine the challenges and opportunities presented by HIPAA. Out of this Workshop came consensus recommendations to establish a Consortium that could represent public health and health services research in the data standards process. Participants recognized the growing importance of standards and the need to be part of the process.

IV. What is the Consortium?

The Public Health Data Standards Consortium (hereafter, the Consortium) is a coalition of organizations with a public health focus and with an interest in data standardization for the purposes of public health and health services research. It was officially established in January 1999 to serve as a mechanism for ongoing representation of public health and health services research interests in HIPAA implementation and other data standards setting processes. The Consortium's mission is to improve the health and health care of the population through improved information. To this end, it seeks to expand public health involvement in existing health data standards and content organizations and to facilitate the development of new public health standards. The Consortium also aims to help educate the public health and health services research communities about HIPAA and health data standards issues. Member organizations include national public health and health data organizations, health services research organizations and federal and state public health agencies.

V. What are the emerging priorities of the Public Health Data Standards Consortium?

The priorities of the Consortium are:

- 1) the conduct of Consortium Steering Committee or work group meetings to explore priority encounter data elements that are most urgent to the needs of public health and health Services research. At a recent Steering Committee meeting, a number of data element priorities were identified, including external cause-of-injury codes, payer type, mothers medical record number on newborn encounter and functional status,
- 2) analytical studies of these data elements to determine how they can best be incorporated into national standards to meet the needs of public health and research. This will require working with the key Standards Development Organizations – the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), ANSI Accredited Standards Committee X12 (ANSI ASC X-12), Health Level Seven (HL 7), and data content organizations – the National Uniform Billing Committee (NUBC) and National Uniform Claim Committee (NUCC), and
- 3) educational efforts and tools (e.g., teleconferences, curricula, strategies and user-friendly guides) to promote and facilitate the movement of state public health data systems to national standards (e.g., encounter and claims attachment standards required for plans and providers under HIPAA).

Your organization () is a member of the PHDSC. To obtain more information about how you can participate in the PHDSC activities through (), contact NAME_____Phone Number () .

For further information:

- Access the website: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/otheract/phdsc/phdsc.htm>
- Subscribe to the PH-CONSORTIUM-L listserv via your e-mail, following these instructions: Send e-mail to LISTSERV@LIST.NIH.GOV with the following text in the message body:
SUBSCRIBE PH-CONSORTIUM-L YOUR NAME

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